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History and present status of prison education in United States.

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The History And Present Status of Prison Education In The United States.

Submitted by

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Outline.

1. Introduction and Definitions.

The late President Roosevelt once defined the function of the prison as being two-fold; to protect society and to salvage men. Of the two the latter should be the chief concern of society says A.C.Hill, compiler of the 1913 and 1923 Federal Reports on Prison Schools; the prison can best protect society by trying to reconstruct men and women, merely shutting them up for a time to be later turned loose to continue careers of crime is certainly not the way to protect or improve society.

When we speak of prison education we must think of it in the broadest possible meaning of the term. "Prison education means the <u>whole set</u> of factors or agencies designed by the institution to reclaim and train prisoners."(1) It is essentally a problem of socialization and requires a modification of the general attitude and a transferance of allegiance from one group to another, plus a sublimation of special interests and attitudes. In this process a few steps are certain. The prisoner must be immersed in the accepted traditions of society, and that is best done through frequent contacts with people holding to these

1. Sutherland, Criminology, p.474.

traditions. Although this is not always practicable other methods of producing contacts with the ideals and higher aims of society are to be found in reading, picture shows, lectures, classroom work and sermons. The desired change is most frequently very gradual and consists in enlarging the interests of the group to which the prisoner belongs until he feels himself identified with the larger group. The process of socialization consists in building up concrete attitudes and interests and is essentially a process of sublimation or redirection of tendencies from paths that are in conflict with the laws of society to paths that are in accordance with these laws . The prisoner must realize definitely that crime is not the only exciting activity and other definite activities must be found which will meet the needs of each individual prisoner, things which will continue to be exciting and interesting to him after he returns to ordinary society. This is especially true of recreational activities. An intense study of attitudes and interests of each prisoner and much experimentation is needed here. In this work of socialization use can be made of the classroom, vocational training, recreation, the library, entertainments and self-government plans as we shall see later on.

2. The Problem Of Reformation.

Reformation is at best a belated effort to combat a chronic condition that ought not to have been allowed to develop. Prevention is much easier than cure and much less costly. It is now quite clear to those who have given the matter study and thought that prevention of moral disease is easier than its cure. A man must reform himself, he cannot be reformed by others. The most that others can do is to provide a favorable environment, that is, to open the door of opportunity and encourage him to enter. Men in prison can and do reform, since there are well authenticated instances to prove it. "The loneliness of the cell affords time for reflection and leads to a realization of the unhappy outcome of the course that he has taken. The irresistable laws of life in society are brought home to the mind of the convict as never before. Men who are no longer in the thoughtless immaturity of youth, but who are in a period of reason and judgment are ready for a second thought and have ample opportunity for it. This second thought may either confirm a man in iniquity or lead him to reform."(1)

The time is critical and much depends upon the atmosphere of the prison and the activities that prevail there. If he is treated like a brute by brutes he will become more brutalized; if he is treated like a man by men he will tend to react more like a man, at least while he

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1A.C.Hill, Prison Schools, p.12.

is in prison and may be led to prepare to return to society as a worthy citizen.

3.The History Of Prison Education.

Much may be written of the history of prison methods and systems in general, but we shall here confine ourselves strictly to the history of the educational systems and methods that have gradually developed in the prisons of the United States.

The church has been interested in the conversion of prisoners since the origin of imprisonment. In the mediaeval period preachers and priests visited the prisons more or less regularly. Many of the suggestions for prison reform in the days before John Howard, the English philanthropist and penologist of the eighteenth century, came from these contacts between prisoners and preachers. According to Sutherland there is no evidence that the clergymen in America in the Colonial Period made similar visits. The first recorded instances of similar visitation of prisoners was made by the Quakers of Philadelphia just prior to the Revolutionary War. Bibles and tracts were distributed, but until 1845 regular chaplains were few, generally inefficient and but poorly paid. (1) The development of secular educational work in prisons resulted from the effort to teach the prisoners how to read these tracts and the Bible.

The earlier work was not without opposition

1.E.H.Sutherland, Criminology, p.474.

however, for in 1824 the warden of Auburn successfully prevented an attempt to teach the younger convicts to read and write because of the "increased danger to society of the educated convict." (1) And at Reading in England the chaplain thought that much discretion ought to be used in teaching the prisoners the three R's because such instruction might prove injurious to both society and the criminal. He advised that training beyond reading be only given to offenders whose conduct gave hope of reformation.

The first organized educational work of this kind in America started in the New York House of Refuge with two hours a day per child, one hour to be spent in learning to read the New Testament and the other to consist of lectures and talks by the superintendent. In the second year the school period was increased to four hours a day and the three R's, geography and bookkeeping were added. In 1826 the chaplain of Auburn prison organized the prisoners into small groups to teach them reading and writing. He was assisted in this work by theological students; during the next few years thirty-one such classes were formed in various prisons and 160 prisoners attended them.

Mr. B.C. Smith, chaplain of Auburn, in the annual report of the inspectors of that prison to the Legislature of New York on January 3,1833 wrote regarding the religious instruction given at Auburn," Since the establishment of

1.Lewis, Development of American Prisons, p.95.

the prison Sabbath School nearly seven years ago, about 550 convicts between eighteen and thirty have been given instruction. A majority of them could only read the simplest lessons by spelling many of the words, and over one hundred commenced with the alphabet." (1) The Sabbath School was declared to be a very important and efficient auxiliary to the labors of the chaplain in educating the prisoners and in bringing about remorse.

The chaplain of Wethersfield, Connecticut prison, Mr. G. Barrett, in a report dated October 7, 1831, says regarding the teaching work there; morning and evening prayers and Bible passages are read and explained. The convicts are "attentive and collected on these occasions." The state furnished each cell with a Bible which could be read at leisure. In passing by their cells Mr. Barrett says that he found 23 out of 25 reading them. Some of those who arrived without knowing how to read were able to do so within two months and their only lessons were in the Bible taught through the grates of their cells. Thus, while scattered religious education was given before the middle of the nineteenth century, as late as 1845 very few institutions taught even the three R's , and these few gave but a small amount of time to formal educational work.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, systematic efforts were made to introduce this elementary

1 Beaumont and DeTocqueville Report, (1833 Translation.)

educational work into all penal and reformatory institutions. Up to this time the chaplain had to stand in the semi-dark corridor before the cell door "with a dingy lantern hanging to the grated bars and teach the wretched convict in the darkness beyond the grated door the rudiments of reading and numbers." (1)

In 1847 the New York State Legislature gave the first legal recognition of academic education in penal and reformatory institutions by providing for the appointment of two teachers for each state prison to give not less than one and one half hours of English instruction each day except Sunday in the evening between six and nine o'clock. The salary was $150 per year. Within a few years many of the prisons in other states made similar provisions, although most educational work was confined to the evening and no classes or congregate groups were permitted. In fact it was not legal to have congregate classes in Pennsylvania in the Eastern Penitentiary until 1913. Since the Civil War the importance of real education among prisoners has been more generally recognized.

Prison schools are the expression of the highest conception yet formed of the proper way to deal with men and women who are segregated from society for violating

1. Lewis, Development of American Prisons, p.341.

its laws. They are the outgrowth of the idea that the door of hope must never be closed to any human being. Prison schools have but little history because they are of comparatively recent origin. Scarcely existing in other countries and only established in the United States in recent years. The New York State Prison Schools, for example, were only organized in 1905, but they have been in continuous operation ever since, six days a week and twelve months a year; for to the prisoner holidays are his longest and most restless days and are to be avoided rather than sought for.

In the 1913 report from fifty-five prisons for adults in the United States and Canada, forty-four had schools. Twenty-seven of these were in the evening, nineteen were day schools and eight sponsored correspondence courses. Sessions varied from less than seven months to twelve months, and from less than four days a week to seven days a week. Thirty-three had civilian teachers in charge, thirty-six had libraries in twenty-seven of which the reading was supervised, and nineteen taught various trades.

That school work in prisons does not yet receive the attention and concentration that its socializing value deserves is apparent. Prison labor, that is shop work to help reduce the general expenses of the institution, still

seems to have the right of way. The curriculum may be said in general to be largely reading and writing while the social studies of history, civics and the other economic-social studies are largely neglected. Until such courses are included in the curriculum of the prison school they will not be functioning to the best of advantage for either society or the inmates. Not until there is a wider recognition of the reformative value of the various aspects of prison education will the movement advance to the place where it will become the vital factor in the reformation of criminals that it is potentially able to become.

4.Types of Prisoners.(General Information.)

During the past, various theories of criminality have been presented and along with them was the general idea that the criminal was of low intelligence. Insanity and feeblemindedness were stressed as accountable for as high as forty percent of all criminality. The theory of the criminal "type" of Lomboroso has likewise passed away pretty largely.

Actual facts have been provided for us by an experimenter in this problem. Professor Carl A. Murchison of Clark University has made several studies of the problem of criminal intelligence and in his psychological reports he tells us that the criminal is not always mentally inferior, but may be quite the contrary. Dr. Murchison says that "after hearing the guards in a certain penitentiary describe in condescending terms their ideas of criminals, the author had an opportunity to compare the mental test scores of the guards with those of the criminals. The average score of the criminals was just 75% higher than the average score of the guards." (1)

The gist of Dr. Murchison's findings follows. The general criminal type disappears in the classification of types of crime and we find that types differ greatly in

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1.Murchison,American White Criminal Intelligence, p.18.

intelligence. Intelligence is just as important a problem as feeblemindedness is. The criminal is much less literate than was the American Army during the World War though. The criminal varies from the lowest grades of intelligence to high school and college graduates. There are men from the unskilled trades as well as thoroughly skilled accountants, musicians, machinists, engineers, telegraphers, etc. "Criminals from the unskilled trades are about as intelligent as the other members of their trade, but criminals from the skilled trades are more intelligent than the other members of their trade."(1) The criminal is religious. "The vast majority belonging to some established religious denomination." "There are more single men than married men, but the married men are more intelligent and more literate. The migratory man is especially intelligent." The criminal group is relatively youthful, but the fraud group is the most intelligent and oldest group while the force group is made up of extremely young men."In terms of Alpha scores the criminal group is superior to the white "draft" group(which included many who were rejected,) and a moving population in probably more intelligent than is a stationary one." (2)

So it becomes apparent that in prison one can find men and women of all grades of intelligence, ability and education, although the poorer trained and less able seem to predominate. There are more illiterates in prisons

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1,2. Murchison, American White Criminal Intelligence,p.139.

than in reformatories because the latter receives younger prisoners. In Massachusetts about twelve percent of the prison inmates were illiterate during a ten year period and in 1927 of 7,511 males in jails and houses of correction in Massachusetts 86 could not read nor write, and of 204 females 5 could not read nor write. In the same year, though, of 125 prisoners sentenced to the state prison all could read and write.(1) Most illiterates are of foreign birth who have had no opportunity to get an education either here or in the home land. In the Massachusetts state prison a method of procedure is followed in teaching this group which helps them to secure an elementary education, and they can go on as far as they like beyond that. New York compells every illiterate to attend such classes until he can read and write, although short terms often interfere with the desired end. In Massachusetts it has been demonstrated that uneducated criminals readily lapse into crime and that "illiterates who have been educated in prison seldom relapse into crime." (2) This would have been news to the early opponents of prison education.

Mr. George E. Lewis of the New York Board of Parole is reported to have said that prison school pupils are almost always eager to learn and they display

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1.1927 Report of Massachusetts Commissioner of Correction.
2.Massachusetts Prison Association Leaflet #39, p.10.

great patience in gaining an elementary education. Many of the convicts who have appeared before the parole board have learned to read and write in prison and those up for parole have often learned some trade while in prison and hope to make a decent living at it when released. We shall have more to say about vocational training later.

Mrs. Kate Richards O'Hare, the noted social worker who was made a political prisoner at Jefferson City, Missouri during the World War, has this comment to make about the group of women prisoners that she found in that prison. "They were almost without exception poorly educated, but very few having reached the sixth grade in school and many were illiterate. Excluding the wartime prisoners they were all very poor and from the most poverty pinched sections of the working class and about evenly divided between women from the city slums and from tenant farms and small towns." (1) Mrs. O'Hare goes on to say that perhaps the net of the law had held only the "small fry" and had permitted the larger fish to escape. This would also help to account for the low general intelligence and ability of that group.

1K.R. O'Hare, In Prison, p.39.

5. Outline Of Courses Needed.

Because of the greatly diversified prison population, being comprised as it is of men and women of every degree of intelligence, ability and education, it becomes evident that a great variety of courses are needed to meet the needs of this group. The reading, writing and figuring of the classroom work must begin with the simplest elements, but must also make adequate provision for the most advanced inmate if he desires to continue his schooling. This latter however, is generally cared for through correspondence courses with outside schools and are of many kinds. They will be discussed fully later on.

As we have defined prison education as being the "whole set of factors or agencies designed to reclaim or train prisoners", we must at once realize that much more is included in the broadest meaning of this term than merely the three R's and other classroom work. The classroom work is, of course, very important for those who cannot read nor write and who may have had a very elementary education, but there are more advanced inmates who have progressed far beyond the limits of the prison school and for such correspondence work is provided by means of the University Extension courses offered by the State of Massachusetts or Columbia University. Another most

valuable and important aid to this more advanced work is the prison library, to which we have devoted a section farther on. The library may easily become a storehouse of instructive and inspirational reading matter and, under a system of properly supervised reading, may become one of the finest and broadest educational agencies offered by the prison.

While "book learning" may be of inestimable value to the prisoner he must also be taught how to earn a decent living when he shall be released from prison. If man cannot live by bread alone, he certainly cannot exist on theoretical learning alone. Therefore it is necessary to provide many inmates with vocational training; that is, with a trade if time and conditions will permit. This with another important element of prison education, namely self-government leagues, will be discussed fully on a later page. Nor should education be complete if it excluded the important element of recreation. All schemes for real reformation must include supervised relaxation as well as supervised labor. All work and no play certainly makes Jack not only a dull boy but also an unruly boy. This is particularly true of prisoners whose very existence is pent up in somber surroundings. If only for the most humanitarian reasons recreation should be given its place in prison education. As it will be discussed later, the

element of social adjustment through learning lessons of self-control and self-discipline in supervised games will be taken up later and an attempt will be made to show that it has a rightful place in any scheme of prison education. As we have seen, the history of prison education had its roots in religious training and this element also has a part in the later discussion of the training of prisoners.

Thus, the field of prison education is a very broad one indeed, comprising much more than what is commonly spoken of by the term "education", namely mere classroom work. This great breadth of training must be kept in mind as we proceed with the discussion and attempt to analyze the problem of "prison education." The various aspects mentioned above are each discussed fully in the remainder of this thesis.

6. The Teaching Force.(Head and Inmate Teachers.)

"Investigations show that the teachers in penal and reformatory institutions with some exceptions are poorly paid and not well prepared for their exceedingly difficult teaching work." (1) In New York State special conferences for prison teachers were early organized to assist in developing a technique and esprit de corps among the teachers, though there are no such conferences in many other states. The general practice in state prisons is to have a civilian teacher and inmate assistant teachers. These inmate assistants are frequently poorly equiped for their work. In Sing Sing in 1922 the average length of experience of inmate teachers was seven months. They do not continue the work long enough to acquire a good technique, although occassionally the head teacher conducts a general methods and theory class for the inmate assistants. In reformatories, especially those for juveniles, the teaching force is customarily made up entirely of civilians. In some places however, such schools are made a branch of the public school system with the same teachers, curriculum and procedure. While this sounds good it seems to be a doubtful procedure according to Sutherland because the delinquent group is a special group and needs a special procedure and policies to meet its peculiar needs.(2)

1.New York Prison Survey Report, 1920, p.216.
2.Sutherland, Criminology, pp.496 and 610-611.

The head teacher is the inspiring, leading and directing power of the whole system. "If he fails no beneficient results will follow, even though the wheels still go 'round." (1) He should be a man of unusual qualities, broadly educated, sympathetic, tactful and above all a man thoroughly devoted to his task. He must be prepared to meet men of all degrees of educational attainment and reasoning ability and to direct their mental powers into right channels and to lead by superior mental and moral force of character and seldom be compelled to summon physical force to his aid. He selects and trains the classroom inmate teachers for their daily duties, chooses material and arranges it for use and supervises instruction. The spirit and way in which he performs his vital tasks determine to a large degree the quality of the prison atmosphere and the results that follow.

Classroom teachers are in many instances inmates. At first thought this may seem to be a fatal defect; but we are assured that there are men in prison of more than ordinary intelligence and not all of them are morally bad. Some have good teaching ability and under proper conditions often develop into good instructors and exert a good influence over their fellows. These schools require the "leadership of persons who share common experiences with the inmates and are able by natural comradship and example

1.Hill,Schools for Adults in Prisons, p.18.

to gain sympathetic attention for the best ideals and habits of life." (1) Their advantage over civilians is that of knowing the men and being able to meet them on more intimate terms. They often bear a sense of responsibility and that they must get onto higher ground themselves if they are to help others up. If they manifest ability and self-control the men look up to them as to another engaged in a like struggle as themselves and there is no impossible barrier between the teacher and the taught. "Many inmate teachers have been remarkable successful in stimulating and helping their fellows to clearer views and better lives, and they have helped themselves in the effort." (2)

During his experience as warden at the Deer Island House of Correction in Boston Harbor Mr.Henry A. Higgins brought to light many interesting facts regarding this problem of inmate teachers. He begins with a few general comments as to the aims of the work and then gives a very interesting and suggestive report of the results he obtained by carefully choosing the inmate teachers who were to actually carry on the work.

The Deer Island school, Mr. Higgins decided, was to be not only for its intellectual advantages but was also

1.Ames,Moral Education of the Training School Inmate,p.126-7.
2.Hill, Schools For Adults In Prisons, p.21.

to be quickened with a moral purpose, which would, in addition to improving the men's minds be "warm with the impulse for better things and higher moral aims." A paid teacher was obtained and the plan was to offer further education to those inmates who already had a fair degree of training. They first met in the evenings in June and they met out of doors. Inmate teachers were carefully selected to help care for the rapidly growing classes. They proved to be enthusiastic and joyful about their work and were proud of their function. While the school was not compulsory everybody of eligible age attended. Nature joined with the educator to make the school a success and it became the outstanding feature of the institution. It inspired a general desire among the men to improve themselves.

Moral and social values came through the right choice of inmate teachers and in Mr. Higgins' association with them. They were chosen for their desirable qualities of leadership, unselfishness, fairness, tolerance, patience and enthusiasm. They discussed prison problems ranging from administration to food and helped shape the opinions of the inmates as well as to unconsciously shape the prison program. As they themselves began to see the limitations of the budget they in turn led the inmates to see why changes were slow, and as these explanations came to them better harmony resulted. A feeling of mutual trust and

confidence developed and the group became more amenable to suggestions from above which replaced the old feeling of distrust, hatred and hidden defiance and contempt. As many of the officers disapproved of these changes and the inmates felt more and more kindly toward the head, they tried to do their part to keep him from becoming discredited among his fellow officers. Nor were the teachers suspected of selling out to the head because they were so obviously chosen for their ability and unselfishness. To have badly chosen these teachers would have discredited the whole work. (1)

1. Higgins, Prison Experiment at Deer Island, pp.1-24.

7. Courses Pursued.

The curriculum of the classroom work is largely confined to reading and writing, nine-tenths of all classroom work consisting of this alone. A very small number of other subjects are included for the minority of advanced prisoners; such courses consist of work in bookkeeping, drawing, stenography and civics. The social sciences other than civics are very seldom given, although it is evident that such courses could make the greatest contribution to the modification of the prisoners' habits, through developing an appreciation of the traditions of organized society. The curriculum, therefore, should be greatly enlarged.

The size of the classes should be small. From twenty to twenty-five are enough, for the small class gives to each man an opportunity, for it is what he does himself that helps each man most. The lecture method, or the pouring in method, is not well adapted to these conditions and the end in view, as well as the effectiveness of the school depends upon the activity of the men themselves as the percentage of illiterates is high among such classes. The more advanced pupils are generally cared for through correspondence work.

In 1913 in New York state there was a daily prison school attendance of approximately 1200 men from 18 to 60 and over, three-fourths were foreign illiterates of over twenty-five different nationalities. (1) In Sing Sing that same year the average school age was 29.8 years. During the year ending June 30,1921,550 persons were enrolled in the prison school in the New Jersey State Prison, but 392 of these dropped out of school during the year for various reasons, as joining the band, leaving the prison, and so on.(2) To teach such groups to read and write and speak English and to know something of the customs and laws of this country is a real task. According to Mr. Lee N. Taplin, head teacher at Auburn in 1913, only that which is necessary and practical for good citizenship in a lowly station of life can be taught.

Several "standards" or degrees of proficiency are set up and the pupils must attain the first before going on to the second, and so on. For example, in Sing Sing in 1913 standard one consisted of learning to speak, recognize at sight, spell and write 200 words. There was also drill in pronunciation. The reading was based on the words learned and sentences were copied with the use of numbers up to 100. Standard two meant that the working vocabulary was increased to 500 words, also the use of the capital letter, punctuation, sentence writing from dictation,

1.Hill, Prison Schools, p.26.
2.New Jersey- State Prison , 1920-21, p.136.

the use of numbers up to 1000, addition, subtraction, and reading the first book for non-English speaking people, with cell lessons from the reading text.

In Clinton Prison at Danemora New York the pupils had to attend school until the fourth standard was completed, after which attendance became optional.

From Mr. Hill's 1913 report entitled, "Prison Schools" we glean the following list of the main features of the prison schools of New York:

1. Modern schoolrooms to accomodate from 20 to 25.

2. A civilian head teacher to outline the work, select and train teachers, supervise teaching and put the right spirit into the movement.

3. A corps of inmate teachers from the best qualified inmates.

4. Twelve standards, each part requiring from two to four months for completion.

5. Cooperation between the various prison schools by conferences of head teachers.

6. General oversight of the system by the State Department of Education.

7. A card record of each man and of the books he has read.

8. Attendance in school at least one and one-quarter

hours each day except Sunday.

9.The division of the school day into four or five periods, both in morning and evening.

10.Men gathered from the shops in companies of one hundred or more and returned at the end of the period when others are taken to school.

11.The only incentive offered that of the benefit to the men themselves and no penalty attached for failure. No examinations to be passed.

The head teachers give all their time to the work and it is never done. Inmate teachers devote all their time to the school work, this gives them time to prepare their work as well as to teach and many do very excellent work.

The results of this school work are many. Improved conduct, relief from the depression of prison life, preparation for positions in the prisons, an increase of chances for success in life outside and fewer returns to prison. The handicap of illiteracy at least has been removed.

b. Correspondence Courses.

Generally speaking there are two kinds of correspondence courses offered in prisons, those which come from outside, as from Columbia University, and those which have been developed within certain prisons themselves. The first is especially useful in advanced work for men with a fair degree of education. In the Ohio penitentiary in 1924 there were 200 prisoners pursuing correspondence courses on everything from poultry raising to advertising and commercial art. A survey of the convicts completing these courses indicated them as successful after release from prison. In the 1927 Massachusetts annual report forty men in the State Prison at Charlestown took University Extension courses from the Massachusetts Department of Education. Also there were classes in Civics, Commercial Law, Spanish, Mathematics and English. (1)

Levering Tyson of Columbia University in 1923 reported the results of Columbia's first experience in teaching the inmates of Sing Sing Prison:

1. In the first place these courses are of college grade and for those sufficiently prepared for such work can be of real advantage in giving mental relaxation and an incentive to work out a worthwhile future for themselves

1. Hill, Schools For Adults In Prisons, p.16.

after leaving prison.

2. These courses necessarily are not valuable as purely vocational subjects as they are of college grade.

3. In prison the study conditions are practically ideal. The men are under strict discipline and there is a teacher handy to refer to if he is needed. Also the distractions of ordinary individuals pursuing home study are lacking.

4. The chief objection is that of interruptions due to transfers or discharge.

5. These courses are worthwhile alone for their effect on the men's futures and their moulding influence may easily become very valuable.

8. Other Valuable Educational Elements.

a. Libraries.

"The printed page is one of the most effective teachers and will often reach men who will not listen to the human voice. The right use of books is the key to success in prison endeavor. Through them the men not only get useful knowledge, but are also brought into touch with inspiring personalities and the achievements of the race. The companionship of books in the lonely hours spent in a narrow cell has a potentcy not easily estimated." (1)

Kentucky had a small library in 1802, though other states had none until about 1840 for they depended upon Bibles alone to provide reading matter for the inmates. In 1845 Connecticut had a small library and each prisoner was furnished a weekly temperance paper and a religious paper. In 1845 Massachusetts also had a library of several hundred books, initiated by the gift of a mother of a life prisoner to her son. She donated fifty dollars to provide him with proper reading matter. The prisoners in the Massachusetts prison made donations out of their own earnings for the library. In the early forties $100 was

1. Hill, Prison Schools, pp. 20-21.

annually appropriated for the prison library and books were distributed at the discretion of the warden and chaplain at intervals of a few weeks in prisons having libraries; although as Sutherland says, "It is probable that all the books in these libraries were theological and were intended to compel the prisoners to contemplate the eternal sufferings to which they would be subjected if they did not repent." As late as 1853 the moral instructor in the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania complained because the books being placed in the prison library were not of a strictly religious nature, resulting in an "alarming decrease in the call of religious books." The chaplain of the women's prison at Sing Sing made public charges against the matron because she supplied the prisoners with such "morally destructive literature as Dickens' "Nicholas Nickleby" and thus interfered with the religious education of the prisoners.

After the prison library movement really started, at about the middle of the nineteenth century, it grew much more rapidly than the school work did and the emphasis was no longer on entirely religious books. To-day we hear such ideas as the following being expressed regarding the prison library:

Reading should be along three general lines,

1.That which is likely to be helpful in gaining a livelihood, as geographical, industrial, business and general information.

2.That which is useful in the matter of conduct, as social information pertaining to the rights and duties of individuals and government and law.

3.That which shows the possibilities of men, as biography, achievement, poetry and inspirational matter generally. (1)

Supervised reading is often necessary, though the teacher must be very tactful about giving suggestions. Mr. Charles D. VanOrden, head teacher at Clinton New York Prison in 1913 gives this from his experience. "If there is a book in the library that I think would help the men I speak of it in a general way to the class, and perhaps read an extract or two from it. I do not ask the men to read it, but before I leave the room several will generally ask for it. If I wish them to read along a certain line a debate is arranged on that subject. The men do a great deal of reading with that incentive." The prison library is properly an adjunct of the school and should really be a continuation school which the men enter after leaving the prison school. As a rule prison libraries are well

1.Hill, Prison Schools, pp.19-20.

stocked, ten thousand volumes being not an unusual number, with additions being constantly made. The chief criticism of the prison library according to Mr. Hill is that of the Russell Sage Foundation, that most of the prison libraries are one-third unreadable and one-half trash. "Not only the possitively bad, but all purposeless reading should be kept from the men who are perishing from lack of moral fiber. Prisons should not foster the evils they seek to destroy nor afford means of increasing the warp in moral nature they are supposed to destroy." (1)

In the Handbook of American Prisons for the East we read that the Massachusetts State Prison has a library of about 8,000 volumes. "A member of the State Library Commission has gone over the entire library, recataloguing, purchasing new books and discarding old ones. The continuance of this policy would soon put the library in first class shape." (2)

The library is one of the ways of giving the prisoners knowledge of the outside world and of other nations and governments and of the occupations of others. Such reading should set them to thinking and aid them in attaining a hopeful mental attitude.

1.Hill, Prison Schools, p.22.
2.Handbook of American Prisons In The East, p.140.

The prison librarian is more than a mere mechanical distributor of books. He must create a want for books of the right sort, outline courses of reading to meet individual needs and tastes and be able to correctly judge and measure results. He should devote his full time to the work if the results are to be truly valuable, and the position is too important to be entrusted to any but the most competent and conscientious. Inmates, we are advised, seldom have these essential qualifications.

The New York State Library Association adopted these suggestions in an endeavor to improve prison libraries:

1. The elimination of debasing and enervating paper covered books that are sereptitiously brought into and circulated in practically every prison in the country.

2. A material reduction of the number of titles received, eliminating all supremely bad and all not distinctly bracing to the mind.

3. The employment of able civilian librarians of tact and sympathy.

4. The library work should be closely associated with the school work and directed by competent persons.

Generally speaking, libraries are most carelessly selected, and, with a few exceptions, are below the grade of an average public library of the same size.(1) Books

1. Curtis, Libraries Of The American State Institutions, p.22.

of history, biography and travel, which should be especially strong, are frequently out-of-date and unreadable. Institutions for juvenile delinquents are even found to have libraries inferior to those for adults.

Thus it is apparent that there is yet a great deal to be done in this field before all prison libraries become the valuable adjuncts to prison education which they are potentially able to become.

b. Vocational Training.

It will be interesting to open this section with a presentation of arguments both pro and con on vocational training for prisoners.

Mr. L.F. Smith, a teacher at the Wisconsin Prison at Waupun had this to say upon the subject: "Vocational training must be given a high place in the promotion of reformation. The men must have something to do and something congenial. An intelligent man likes to feel that he is bettering his condition and the majority are willing to take advantage of such privileges." (1)

Mr. John B. Brunson, head teacher at Clinton Prison in New York said: "For those who have not a firm economic foundation one should be supplied by a properly adapted course of vocational training in the broad sense of any training outside of the profession of getting a livelihood." (2)

But on the other hand we have such an authority as Mr. Earl P. Murray, head teacher of Great Meadow New York saying in 1924 that secondary place must be given to

1,2. Hill, Schools For Adults In Prisons, p.10.

vocational training in promoting reformation, because, "First, to take up vocational training advantageously one must have covered at least the elementary school subjects and be able to understand conversational English. Second, to train an inmate vocationally without changing his criminal tendencies simply places in his hands a dangerous weapon to be used more successfully against society. Third, many inmates already have a trade but nevertheless are habitual criminals, proving that vocational training alone does not deter the criminal, but rather aids him in carrying his plans into more successful operation. Fourth, vocational training is helpful to the unskilled laborer, but it is not the most essential thing in promoting reformation." (1)

In 1913 Mr. Hill reported that 19 out of 55 state prisons taught trades and in 1919 the same estimate was held to by the Committee of the American Prison Association. In some prisons there is supervision of the productive and industrial work that approaches trade instruction.

In New Jersey the state prison makes a careful study of entering prisoners to determine their capacities and interests and they are assigned to work in accordance

1.Hill, Schools For Adults In Prisons, pp.10-11.

with these findings. This would seem to be an excellent way to be assured that the individual's future work would be both along the line of his interests and abilities. Thus a double incentive is provided and a most satisfactory assignment of their tasks furnishes the basis for training in the specified forms of work. The difficulty may be in developing the training in proportion to the method of assignment. In 1927 the Massachusetts State Prison built a foundry that employed from 38 to 45 men who are turning out splendid work. Manhole covers and other heavy castings are made for the cities and towns throughout the state. It is quite a problem, though, in the shoe and printing departments to get men able to do the fine work because they are soon transferred or discharged. Vocational training, variety and efficiency at Charlestown goes some way, though not very far, toward offering the industrial training which every prison should give. (1)

The teaching of agriculture has sometimes been spoken of as the great answer to the convict labor problem. The disadvantages are that in most parts of the United States not much farm work can be done, farmers are unwilling generally to employ convicts and many prisoners, coming from the cities, are generally unwilling to live in the

1. Massachusetts 1927 Report of Commissioner of Correction.

country. It would be most unwise to train all prisoners in one trade. Only those who are fitted for it and want the training should be given any such special instruction.

According to Nalder in "The American State Reformatory" the vocational training in reformatories for young adults is not much better than that in the state prisons.(1) He felt that it would be better to develop right attitudes rather than to continue to give poor and resultless vocational training. The difficulty is that the inmates stay for too short a time to really acquire a trade, or else they shift from one trade to another before they learn the first one.

In 1921 in Elmira out of 1462 inmates receiving instruction in the trades only 26 graduated. Many of the institutions for juveniles are also handicaped by the youthful ages of the inmates. In New York in 1923 the average age was only 13 years and the average period of time spent at the institution was one year. They also find it hard to get a position when released. This may be due to their youth as well as to their lack of technical knowledge of any one trade.

Jails and workhouses have no vocational training, though some skill may be acquired in the productive labor

1.Nalder,American State Reformatory, p.420.

labor and maintainance work of the institution.

The situation seems to be very well summarized by Mr. Hill in his 1923 report. "Work is unquestionably a factor of reformation, it is not however the chief factor. When a man has learned to labor with his hands, to do something with interest and to take pride in the quality and quantity of his daily output he has gained in self-mastery, in self-respect and in consciousness of power. Work as a factor of reformation should not be exagerated, though, for the prison is not a workshop. Many prisoners came from workshops and these did not insure against criminality. Men do not go to prison because they can not earn a livelihood on the outside, but because their inner selves led them to unlawful and unsocial actions." (1)

"Society owes to each inmate of its penal institutions a solemn obligation to furnish vocational guidance and if possible vocational preparation for a successful life on the outside. The offender who comes out of prison ill-fitted to earn his living is not likely long to abstain from crime." (2) Complete vocational preparation may be very expensive and impractical in the prison, but at least there should be a wide choice of occupations which shall provide a majority of the inmates with some congenial

1.Hill, Schools For Adults In Prisons, p.6.
2.Groves, Social Problems And Education, p.57.

employment whereby they may earn a respectable living when they are released.

c. Self-Government.

"Self-government in penal institutions is merely an application of the educational principle that people learn by doing. It is based on no unusual and quixotic conception of the rights of prisoners - as their right to vote, to take part in the government over them, to say what orders shall be obeyed and who shall issue these orders. It is obvious that the great majority of people in prison have failed to adjust themselves to the social milieu. What better remedy for this is there than to train them to adjust themselves to the prison milieu? Self-government is, or ought to be, the setting up of a miniature world in which relationships become normal, acts spontaneous and the power of choice free, within limits set by the necessity of keeping prisoners confined. Its aim is to fit the prisoner for a return to society. Its method is to establish on a small scale a society in which he can form habits, accustom himself to the responsabilities and gradually acquire the mental attitude that make normal life attainable. Self-government is therefore more than a mere lesson in citizenship, it is an effort to train persons in the art of living in concert." Thus Dr. Wines and Mr.Lane in their volume "Punishment and Reform" lucidly set forth the problem.

Self-government is one of the efforts made to wrest the prisoner from the iron grip of treadmill monotony that quickly advances from a slavery of the body to a slavery of the mind. The aim of self-government is loyalty, not to one's pal alone but to the entire prison population. It means the substitution of an already existing allegiance for another of like kind.

Some objections are always made to any scheme of self-government, largely on the grounds that the prisoners were unable to take care of themselves on the outside, so why expect them to do so in prison? As Wines and Lane suggest, there is a two-fold answer to this objection: In the first place, some law-breakers, instead of merely lacking self-control have simply used it for anti-social purposes. And as regards those prisoners who do really lack self-control, is the autocratic or the self-government system more likely to remedy the deficiency? The former has so far failed to do do, why then not give the second a try? Under it at least a more congenial atmosphere is present in which the prisoner can reverse his old false ideas. The other main objection is that prisoners are such because not enough restraint and control was exercised over them in the past and that self-government would tend to continue this policy, and a policy of no

restraint would be futile. Such questioners do not realize that self-government is not an abolition of all restraint, for through self-government itself and the collective action on the part of all the element or restraint is still present. A different type of restraint, and yet a very real kind, as has been proven in many instances. The prisoner is still liable to special punishment meted out by his fellows, and this is frequently more strict than the decrees of a humane warden would have been. And if finally such control should fail in individual instances the state is still free to step in and bring in its own force.

To be sure, not all inmates of penal institutions are capable of profiting from self-government. Mental defectives and insane prisoners must be excluded. But this segregation holds already in the outside world. While inmate self-government is paternalistic, "its paternalism may be no more than that involved in all forms of formal education." As Wines and Lane suggest, a more correct designation would be "inmate participation in self-government". Its aim is to provide the wayward member of society with a better preparation for his return to society by permitting him to assume a larger or smaller part in the control of his affairs.

The history of self-government work in the United States begins in 1824 at the New York House of Refuge and at the Boston House of Reformation where a monitorial system prevaled. Here as in many later attempts, the defect was in the fact that success seems more due to the "distinguished man who put it into practice" than to the excellencies of the system. These efforts, being far in advance of their time, seemed to make but little impression upon the prison world. Later experiments were made at the George Junior Republic at Freeville New York by William George in 1895 and by Calvin Derrick in the California State Reformatory at Ione in 1912, and again by Mr. Osborne at Auburn New York, and later at Sing Sing.

The George Junior Republic has been very successful with boys and girls and they have gradually established a community modeled upon the larger republic of the United States with the three branches of government under the control of the "citizens" themselves. "Not only have many of the Republic's citizens gone through college and become successful in professional and business life, but a few have achieved distinction as lawyers, engineers, journalists, leaders in boy's work, one missionary, a contractor and several large holders of agricultural interests." (1)

1.Wines and Lane,Punishment And Reform, p.382.

In 1904 Mr. Osborne said in an address before the Prison Association, quoting Mr. Gladstone, "It is liberty alone that fits men for liberty." He and Mr. Derrick apparently based their work on that assumption. Both men were particularly successful and achieved worthwhile results from their efforts.

But self-government schemes have not always been successful , for at Cheshire, Connecticut and at Rahway, New Jersey inmate self-government plans apparently failed. At Cheshire the warden said: "The reason for dissatisfaction was that it lent itself to so much misrule and dishonesty that the members were tired of it. The young men were to a large extent foreigners. Many of them knew little of the English language and very few knew anything about forms of government." (1) At Rahway the experiment was abandoned within one year. The weakness, suggests Mr. Lane may have been in not having the right kind of official guidance, for "bribery, threats and violence did not interfere with the success of self-government in the Ione Reformatory or the Westchester County penitentiary, or at Sing Sing".(2)

Honor systems and self-government plans are frequently advocated for their educational value to the

1.Wines and Lane,Punishment and Reform, p.407.
2.Ibid, p.409.

inmates. "A real impetus has been given to education in the state prisons as a result of the work of the Mutual Welfare League at Sing Sing Prison." (1) The school work of the Self-Government League however has not continued to be as satisfactory as it was in the begining.(2) Besides giving the prisoners an opportunity to make choices and to discuss and cooperate with others self-government is valuable from the educational point of view in that it tends to affect the public opinion within the prison and thus develop and direct the opinion of the group as a whole toward the systematic and orderly life of the group. "It seems clear that it has this advantage and that it is very valuable, but the disadvantages and difficulties of self-government make it impossible as a general and unrestricted method of control." (3) Thus we realize that the problem of self-government in prisons has far to go before a satisfactory solution of the problem shall have been reached.

1.Klein, Prison Methods In New York State, pp. 315 and 320.
2.Sutherland, Criminology, p.495.
3.Ibid, p.496.

d. Recreation.

Recreation is as essential to mental and moral health as it is to physical well-being. A scheme for promoting reformation must include rest as well as work, relaxation as well an serious thought.

Humanitarian considerations were the deciding factors in introducing recreation for adult prisoners, due to the high death rate from tuberculosis and an abnormal incidence of insanity among confined prisoners. Recreation programs wisely planned and well administered prove valuable aids in prison efficiency; better health, more adequate training and improved discipline result. Mr. R.K.Atkinson in one of his reports for the Russell Sage Foundation on the place of play and recreation in penal institutions says that recreation promotes health of body and mind and often dispells the "prison pallor" and "flabbiness of nerve and of muscle have been diminished." "Perversions which have thrived in the midst of physical laziness have been vanishing before the stimulus of vigorous activity. Those who have gone to their cells at night with bodies physically tired and with nerves relaxed have enjoyed wholesome sleep. Interesting activities have banished morbidness. Better far that a group should have participated in an eagerly

anticipated and exciting ball game than that they should have been occupying their minds with petty gossip, intrigue and perversions of the old order." (1)

Often the first offender finds himself involved in some sort of wrongdoing because of misuse of his leisure time, and recidivism is most often due to that cause. Recreation provides a means for social adjustment. The institutional inmate is too often "yellow", a quitter or one who has never played any game of life on the level; through recreation the young especially may learn lessons of self-discipline and self-control which might never be taught in any other way.

In spite of this general realization that recreation is essential to mental and moral health as well as to physical wellbeing, we are told that in some quarters there is still a marked indifference or ignorance of the value of recreation upon the moralle of the prison group. Mrs. O'Hare in her book "In Prison" has the following to offer from her experience with the women prisoners in the far West: The women were ruthlessly dominated in their mental and spiritual lives as well as in their physical. Even a Memorial Day service for their loved ones, to take place after the days work was over, was denied them. They

1.Hill,Schools For Adults In Prisons, pp.21-22.

were also denied the right to produce a little play because, as the matron said, they were too tired after their days work to rehearse, and Mrs. O'Hare says that there was logic in the position because the tasks did taks such a large degree of energy that there was little left for mental growth. Even lectures were denied them. However, on Saturday afternoons during the summer the women were taken to a state owned park where there was a beautiful pavilion. There the men's band played for them and they could sing and walk about in the fresh air. In the winter they were taken to a large assembly hall on the men's side for movie shows on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Immediately after supper on Mondays and Tuesdays they had an hour in the courtyard, surrounded by an eighteen foot high wall where they could move freely under the eyes of the guards. No games were possible because of lack of equipment. Such a limited interpretation of recreation is of course of slight value.

The modern prison makes use of different sorts of entertainments, music, including orchestras, bands and choirs, plays, lectures and picture shows. Those in which the prisoners take part are most useful. The conditions of the prisoner's environment, however, hamper the best use of these as character builders. (1)

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1. Groves, Social Problems And Education, p.60.

e. Religious And Ethical Training.

"It is not common for social workers to put sufficient emphasis upon religion as a reformative influence. The efforts of chaplains in prisons are often too perfunctory and lacking in faith that they will accomplish much of anything. It is not apparent that many chaplains win the confidence of the men or are personally helpful to those who are in desperate need of sympathetic friends. A great opportunity seems to be largely frittered away by many of those who are placed in most intimate relationships with fallen men and women. Only men of genuine religious and missionary spirit should be placed at such vantage points in the moral struggle as are held by chaplains, teachers and guards. Real prison reform must be based on a religious conception of the problem and a determined and persistent effort to improve the religious life of the community. The most superficial study makes it evident that the heart must be reached in order to secure the reconstruction of the character. It is indeed deplorable to have unworthy political considerations enter into the appointments of chaplains for prisons. It is a supreme tragedy to have an unworthy man as a spiritual advisor." (1)

The actual conceptions of prisoners regarding religion is vividly portrayed by Mrs. O'Hare in the following:

1. Hill, Schools For Adults In Prisons, pp.16-17.

The women "hated orthordox religion, but they loved Jesus. This attitude was logical, for despite all the trappings of creed and pomp and respectability with which the message of Jesus had been obscured by the church He is still the patient shepherd of lost sheep, the forbearing master of the under dog, the understanding champion of the poor and lowly. These women were never weary of hearing the story of His life and His tender, loving companionship for the social outcasts of His day. The women believed with implicit faith that He came and walked about the cellhouse at night, and they knew Jesus as only social outcasts can."(1)

They thought of the church as another aspect of the organized, smug society which put and kept them where they were. Convicts are, as a rule, deeply and passionately religious because they need religion more than other people do, but it is not the religion of the church; "it is the religion of David, the outlaw minstrel and Jesus the proscript of Nazareth." (2) They thought of God as embracing all that was good, and they recognized love as the creative and regenerative force of life." They did not know the God of vengeance, of limitless wrath; but they did know the God of service and human brotherhood."(3)

Mr. Brockway, when warden of Elmira, established

1. O'Hare, In Prison, p.127.
2,3. Ibid, p.128.

a class of ethics at Elmira which attracted much attention. The purpose of the class was not to directly inculcate moral maxims in the expectation that the prisoners would adopt them, "but rather to shape in their minds a habit of qualitative moral discrimination."(1) A keen and critical dissecting spirit was sought for. "Morality," Mr. Brockway continues,"means firmly set habits acquired by long practice and severe discipline." "Men cannot be kept steadily thinking with a genuine interest on higher and better things, with reference to better ends, without acquiring better habits of thought." (2) Class discussions were will taken part in and it was felt that the desired for results were achieved to quite a degree.

Early prison education and attempts at reform were begun by the church as we have noted. But while the chaplain has still remained an important person in the prison community religious education has not progressed as far as have the other factors which we have previously mentioned; although the interest for others in unfortunate circumstances has had its roots largely in the religious teachings of the church. Perhaps, as Mr. Hill suggests, when truly effective religious training is given in prisons one of the best solutions of effective prison education shall have been found.

1,2. Brockway,Fifty Years Prison Service, p.246.

9. Summary And Conclusion.

As stated in the introduction, prison education includes the whole set of factors or agencies designed by the institution to reclaim and train prisoners. The prisoner through these various mediums must be brought into active contact with new traditions which will mould his life into accordance with the will of his fellows rather than according to his own selfish aims. His self-centered interests must be enlarged until he feels himself identified with the entire group of society and is truly loyal to it. This process of socialization consists in building up concrete interests and attitudes. It is a sublimation of his tendencies from paths that are in conflict with the laws of society to paths that are in agreement with these laws. This socialization program, as we noted, should make use of the classroom, libraries, vocational training, self-government plans, supervised recreation and religious and ethical education.

There are certain definite hindrances to this educational work among prisoners. First probably is the idea that prisons are primarily places for punishment. The high, stout walls and the bars help to keep this idea constantly before the prisoner and he tends to react by a hostile attitude toward all efforts expended

by the institution. All efforts at education in its broadest sense must be in constant struggle against this attitude. As Sutherland says, "Prisoners cannot be expected to appreciate efforts to help them when the institution as a whole is designed to injure them and make them suffer." But as long as individuals are sent to such institutions for comparatively short terms and then permitted to return to ordinary society, every possible effort should be made to counteract the influences of the institution as a whole by educative methods.

The next great hindrance seems to be the lack of adequate equipment and organization for this work, although a few places, as Rahway New Jersey have up to date equipment and methods.

Again, the productive industry of the institution is a hindrance to the educational work. This of course involves the difficult problem of the comparative importance of labor and formal education; and many exponents may be found to support both sides. The school authorities insisting that the productive work should not interfere with the school, and those interested in the financial status of the institution insisting that the school shall not interfere with productive work. In general the school

activities seem to be organized so as to interfere as little as possible with productive labor. Classes are held in the evenings, after the prisoners have spent the day in the shops. The difficulty seems to be that each side tries to give a general prescription for the entire prison group, though different prisoners may need more of one than of the other. A policy should be adopted for each individual based upon his individual capacities, needs and interests. Mrs. O'Hare says of the criminal laws and methods of the land," The criminal laws that were written for a spinning-wheel, tallow candle, stagecoach civilization cannot be made to function successfully in a radio, airplane, push-the-electric-button civilization." The same might truthfully be said of attempts at prison education.

To be successful, prison education must result in a modification of the general attitude of the individual prisoner. There must be not only an intellectual comprehension of the ideals, sentiments and traditions of society, but these ideals must be translated into action, which alone is the proof of their actual acceptance. In short, it means a conversion from the old self-centered and narrow vision of life to a broader acceptance of one's lot in life and all attempts to alleviate one's conditions must be made in channels in accordance with the will of the majority.

A few steps have been clearly defined through the various successful experiments in this field of reformation. The prisoner must, first of all, be immersed in the accepted traditions of society through contacts with individuals holding to these standards whenever it is practicable. In any event full use can be made of reading, picture shows, lectures, sermons, classroom instruction and the other means outlined above. The aim is in all such work to enlarge the interests of the individual prisoner until he feels himself identified with society as a whole. This process of socialization is necessarily slow and consists in building up concrete attitudes and interests in accordance with the larger will of society and a consequent redirecting of the prisoner's tendencies.

For real success, a careful study of the attitudes and interests of each prisoner should be made before it will be possible to develop a sublimated activity that will give him the same excitement and interest that he previously secured from criminal activity. A few prisoners will no doubt be found whose attitudes are so fixed or limited that no substitute can be found, but the procedure at any rate is fairly certain.(1)

1. Sutherland, Criminology, p.481.

The problem is a vital one and a very broad one, but if successful the savings to society in terms of both individuals and dollars would far more than compensate for the necessary effort and expense to set such a program into operation. Let us hope that along with the other fields of social progress of the day that prison education will receive its full share of attention and effort, for there can be little doubt but that such effort will result in one of the most valuable advances of the age, namely, the annual slavaging of a vast army of human lives for usefulness rather than losing them in a slough of despond and needless segregation.

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